



cerebral zone

What is mindfulness & why does it matter?

By Stephanie Catalano, www.themindfulliving.com

It's not uncommon for people to equate Mindfulness with meditation and yoga. It's true that meditation and yoga are powerful ways to practice Mindfulness, but it doesn't begin and end in a seated position or on the yoga mat.

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness has been defined in many ways, but in essence it is a psychological process of bringing one's attention or awareness to experiences occurring in the present moment, without passing judgment. It is to focus conscious attention on what is happening right here, right now. To be Mindful is to be aware of what's taking place, both internally and externally, and to allow the experience to be what it is without becoming attached or consumed by thoughts, feelings, responses, and even perceptions. This includes body awareness, breathing, posture, and relaxation.

Most people have heard of Mindfulness and maybe even attempted to live by it because they heard it can help with anxiety and stress. However, people live in an extremely fast-paced world, and sometimes, they forget to check in with themselves. It is easy for people to dwell on the past and/or worry about the future. If they make Mindfulness a value, it is easier for them to return their attention to the present moment, which is the only real time that exists.

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Mindfulness teaches people to show up to every moment of their life with a sense of curiosity, imagination, openness, and wonder. It is like living with a mind of a child. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, there are seven attitudes of Mindfulness:

- 1) No judgment
- 2) Non-striving
- 3) Acceptance
- 4) Letting go
- 5) Beginner's mind
- 6) Patience
- 7) Trust

This practice teaches people how to experience and enjoy life as it's happening, rather than waiting for the "right moment" or watching life pass them by.

People like to be in control because it gives a sense of safety and security. It's really interesting how most people try to control everything that is external of them such as the reactions and responses of others and even trying to plan exactly how the day is going to go. This typically leads to anxiety, stress, worry, and many other unpleasant feelings that interrupts the present moment. By practicing Mindfulness, it allows people to become aware of where they are placing their attention and re-focus when needed.

The Importance of Mindfulness and How It Can Help

Life isn't meant to be experienced in the past or the future. It is meant to be experienced and enjoyed in the present moment. Mindfulness is important because it teaches people how to do just that – live in the present moment. Research shows that Mindfulness can help with the following:

- Stress reduction
- Increases focus
- Decreases anxiety
- Increases immune functioning
- Enhances mental health
- Improves relationships
- More cognitive flexibility
- Allows for compassion towards self and others
- Increases emotional regulation and self-control

When it comes to the way a person thinks and feels, being Mindful of their emotions can help them cultivate a more positive mindset and work towards being a 'better', or 'happier' person. The more a person practices Mindfulness, the more it will help them let go of living in the space of "what should have been" and live for what is happening in the here and now. This practice can be especially helpful for parents because it can help with listening to their children with full attention, accepting their children without judgment, and imagine their children(s) feelings and match their own response.

Mindfulness is also helpful for parenting because it reduces a parent's stress and improves their social interaction and connection with their children. This practice can help parents manage their frustration or anger before reacting in stressful situations and help them show compassion for

themselves and their children. Mindfulness doesn't mean a parent will never experience anger, disappointment, frustration, or stress. It does mean *pausing* before reacting in stressful situations. Children don't know how to manage their feelings yet. If the parent can be calm when their child is not, he or she learns they can depend on them.

In the stressful chaos of modern life, how can Mindfulness help with staying focused on what's the most important – staying present, grateful, and happy – and staying calm in the midst of a baby's crying, a toddler's tantrum, or a teen's defiance?

Here are five ways you as a parent can be Mindful:

1. Cultivate Mindful moments when you are at a red light or in the shower by naming what went well today and what you are grateful for.
2. Pause when needed, take a few deep breaths, then choose a response to the situation rather than reacting without thinking.
3. Accept your children by acknowledging all of their feelings without becoming overwhelmed by it. The parent could respond with patience, rather than react out of frustration.
4. Evaluate a situation from a place of curiosity rather than making assumptions. What is making you so upset as opposed to you're always upset over nothing.
5. Make an effort to imagine a situation from your child's point of view. It can be easy to forget that it can feel scary to be a child; there is a lot of unknown.

Children depend on their parents for safety and security. If your child is upset, you could respond with compassion. For example, "You really don't like when mommy drops you off at school. Don't worry, mommy will be back soon, and she loves you."

To learn more about Stephanie, visit www.themindfulliving.com and follow her on Emenator @mindfulliving, Instagram @mindfulliving.now, and Facebook @mindfulliving for daily inspiration, Mindful skills, tips, and more. Find Mindful Makeover Workbook and Guide on Amazon and check out The Mindful Makeover Podcast available on iTunes and Spotify.

